Bert Slaughter's 100 Year Predictions

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Bert Slaughter (1876-1961) was a Fairbury native who was a businessman and township official for many years. For about 20 years, Bert lived in the Little Castle house at 608 East Ash Street.

The Fairbury Township High School had nine students in the graduating class of 1897. The graduation exercise was held in the Central Opera House, located on the northwest corner of Locust and Fifth Streets. As a member of the 1897 graduating class, Bert Slaughter gave a speech where he predicted what life would be like 100 years in the future.

In his speech, Bert predicted that invention and education would be the biggest drivers of change in the next 100 years. Bert's first prediction was that electric railroads would replace the steam locomotives of his era. The TP&W Railroad that runs through Fairbury started switching from steam-powered to diesel-powered locomotives around 1941. Most freight and passenger trains in America are powered by diesel engines today. Some countries, such as Japan, have a few high-speed "Bullet Trains ."25,000 volt overhead electric lines power these high-speed trains. The electricity for these high-speed trains is generated from a combination of coal-fired, natural gas-fired, and nuclear power plants.

Bert's second prediction was that electric carriages and wagons would do away with horses and horse-drawn wagons. Battery-powered cars were tried out in the early 1900s, but the internal combustion engine won the competition to power all moving vehicles. Battery-powered electric cars have been tried again in the last decade, but so far, they remain too expensive for widespread usage.

By 1920, almost all Fairbury residents had switched from horses to internal combustion-powered automobiles. Horses continued to be used on Fairbury area farms until they were replaced entirely by tractors in the 1940s.

Bert's third prediction was that the whole system of electric lighting would be changed. In 1897, electricity was available in Fairbury but not on area farms. Farms did not receive electricity until the 1940s. Bert's prediction about electric lighting was correct in that all residential and commercial buildings now use electricity and electric lighting.

Bert's fourth prediction was that the telegraph and telephone would be replaced by more modern instruments on a different system. In 1897, Fairbury's telephone system had just been in existence for a couple of years. Bert's prediction about other communication systems was correct. The telegraph was obsolete many decades ago. Today, cell phones and the Internet have become the primary communication tools.

Bert also predicted that lighter-than-air dirigible balloons would be flying over cities in the next 100 years. The dirigible balloon did enjoy a period of popularity in the early decades of the 20th century. This popularity ended when the Hindenburg airship crashed and burned in 1937 in New Jersey. Thirty-five of the 97 people on board were killed in the fiery crash.

The Wright brothers did their first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903. Eventually, passenger planes became powered by jet engines and are now one of the most popular methods of traveling long distances.

Bert's sixth prediction was that all labor and property would be in common. He predicted that money would be plentiful and property would become a fraction of the past. Bert predicted prosperity, pleasure, and happiness would reign supreme in one hundred years.

America was founded as a capitalist society. Under this system, people can choose how to use their own labor. People are also free to purchase and own their property. Although the federal government has placed many restrictions on the capitalist free-market system, America continues to be a capitalist society. The capitalist system has allowed America to become the greatest country in the history of humankind. By most measures, citizens in the 21st century enjoy many more benefits than were available in 1897.

Bert's seventh prediction was that cities would grow much larger, and their architecture would finally exceed the Greek architecture from 2,400 years ago. This prediction became true with the invention of the skyscraper in 1885. The world's first skyscraper was the Home Insurance Building in Chicago. It was ten stories tall with a peak of 138 feet. Architects and engineers continued to improve building designs, and eventually, every city in America had many skyscrapers.

The eighth prediction that Bert made was about the educational system. Bert predicted that in the 21st century, education would be carried on differently and under severe rules. The educational institutions would be on a much grander scale and would all be run by the government. Bert predicted that public school buildings would be enormous and numerous.

Bert predicted that 21st-century school life would be strict and tedious but at the same time happy. When the twenty-first-century student leaves the public school, he will be a thoroughly educated man fitted for any emergency which may present itself in life. All people would be educated, and ignorance will have ceased to exist.

In 1897, there was no separate high school building in Fairbury. Each year, Isaac Walton or Edison was designated as the high school for that school year. A separate high school building was built in 1913 on Seventh Street.

Since 1897, the most significant change in the Fairbury school system was the consolidation of surrounding communities into one school system.

Yogi Berra was a colorful baseball player, manager, and coach. He was known for his unique quotes about many subjects. One of Yogi's most famous quotes was, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." Three of the eight predictions that Bert Slaughter made back in 1897 have come true. Bert concluded his speech by saying, "On the whole, a day of the world's history in the year two thousand will be a day of invention, education, and prosperity." In general, Bert was correct in predicting that American life would be much improved over the next 100 years.

Bert Slaughter (1876-1969) with his son in Fairbury.